

EU – Africa: A common future

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As we face the challenges of the 21st century there is more that unites Africa and Europe than divides us. We share a common history of thousands of years. Today more than ever we need to work together to build our common future and to work jointly on the defining global issues of our age.

We both have a shared view of the benefits of cooperation on our continents. Europe's journey from the devastation of 1945 to a Union of more than half a billion citizens based on shared values and designed to create peace and prosperity is well known. So too is Africa's liberation from colonial rule to independence and greater integration through the creation of the African Union (AU). Our journeys towards integration are far from over but by working together we can help each other forging stronger ties, learning the lessons from each other's experiences and building sustainable growth that will benefit our citizens. Our two institutions, the African Union Commission and the European Commission work jointly to help drive this process forward.

Sustainable and inclusive growth and development for both Africa and Europe must benefit us all. This was well recognised by the leaders of Africa and Europe at the last EU-Africa Summit when they put Human Development at the heart of our cooperation. Africa's population is growing fast. By 2035, the number of young African men and women entering the job market will exceed that of the rest of the world. The full and equal participation of women is essential. As the African Union's Agenda 2063 recognises, no society can reach its full potential unless it empowers women and removes all obstacles to women's full participation in all areas of human endeavour. To fully benefit from the demographic dividend, Africa needs to implement the policies spelt out in Agenda 2063 and these need to be implemented fast.

We know that sustainable development can only occur in stable and secure societies. We know, too, that security will be undermined if equal access to the benefits of sustainable development is not assured. This is becoming even more evident in times when terrorist groups are targeting disenchanting and often unemployed youth groups that seek to spread violent sectarian ideologies to destroy the pluralism of our societies. We must guarantee that all citizens, in particular the youth, find a place in society and be fully empowered to reach their potential.

Security cannot exist without justice, democracy, the rule of law, good governance and the effective respect for human rights of all individuals and communities. 2016 is the African Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the Rights of Women. The European Union (EU) has also designated 2016 as a year of human rights activism and global campaigning. This is an opportunity for all of us to team up, strengthen our work together in support of the African Governance Architecture, as well as in support of universally agreed human rights. Africa can be proud of having one of the strongest human rights' frameworks in the world: by the end of 2016 we should ensure that all our Member States have ratified all human rights treaties.

The African Peace and Security Architecture is designed to enable Africa to manage its own peace and security. This is in our common interest and the European Union is ready to continue supporting this goal. The work that has been done in countries like Somalia, the Central African Republic and Mali bears testimony to this. The African Peace Facility has pioneered a shared EU-Africa commitment by giving Africa the means to develop and use its own capacity to carry out essential mediation work, to prevent conflicts and to secure peace. In light of the connectivity of global threats and major regional crises, a strong and resilient African Union is essential.

Today's migration crisis, partly rooted in violent conflicts, also makes a compelling case for closer cooperation. Europe is confronted by an unprecedented flow of refugees and asylum seekers. In Africa, too, people are on the move – from villages to cities, to neighbouring countries and sometimes towards Europe. Those moves are mainly motivated by fear and hope. Fear of conflict and poverty, hope for peace, security and opportunities. We must address both the fears and the hopes. If we want to ensure integration, we must manage human mobility. Our two Commissions will continue to work together on migration and mobility. We will work together to address the root causes of illegal migration, support mobility and labour migration, reduce the cost of remittances, strengthen international protection, facilitate return and to combat human trafficking.

There is optimism about Africa's future, and rightly so. For more than a decade, Africa has enjoyed sustained economic growth. Africa is an increasingly attractive place to do business. Trade with the EU has increased by 50% since 2007. Around 40% of Africa's exports are made up of processed products, with a consistent trade surplus in Africa's favour. The EU remains Africa's main trading partner. Investments by European companies and their subsidiaries in Africa total over EUR 200 billion annually, making the EU Africa's leading investment partner. Trade and investment relations between Africa and the EU can be improved further through closer cooperation, policy coordination and the conclusion of WTO negotiations. Europe also remains Africa's main development partner with more than €20 billion official development assistance (ODA) per year.

But continued growth cannot be taken for granted. Decreasing price of oil and other commodities as well as reduced demand from China and other emerging economies will have negative impacts. Africa's reliance on raw material exports makes it vulnerable to downturns in demand in overseas markets, hence the need for value addition through industrialisation.

Our two Commissions are working together to promote industrialisation, diversification and increasing value added. We are working together to promote investments in African infrastructure, facilitate technology transfer and intensify joint research and development. Last but not least, we are working together to boost agriculture to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This is why creating a Continental Free Trade Area which promotes free and fair trade is so important.

Our Unions, our two continents face common challenges From climate change, migration, ensuring sustainable economic growth to the fight against terrorism and violent extremism; those are challenges that we have to face together. We know well that we are stronger when we are working together. We are starting preparations for

the 5th EU-Africa Summit to be held in Africa in 2017 with these objectives well in mind.